

SONNETS

LABAN LACY RICE







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TO
B. B. R.

BY
LABAN LACY RICE



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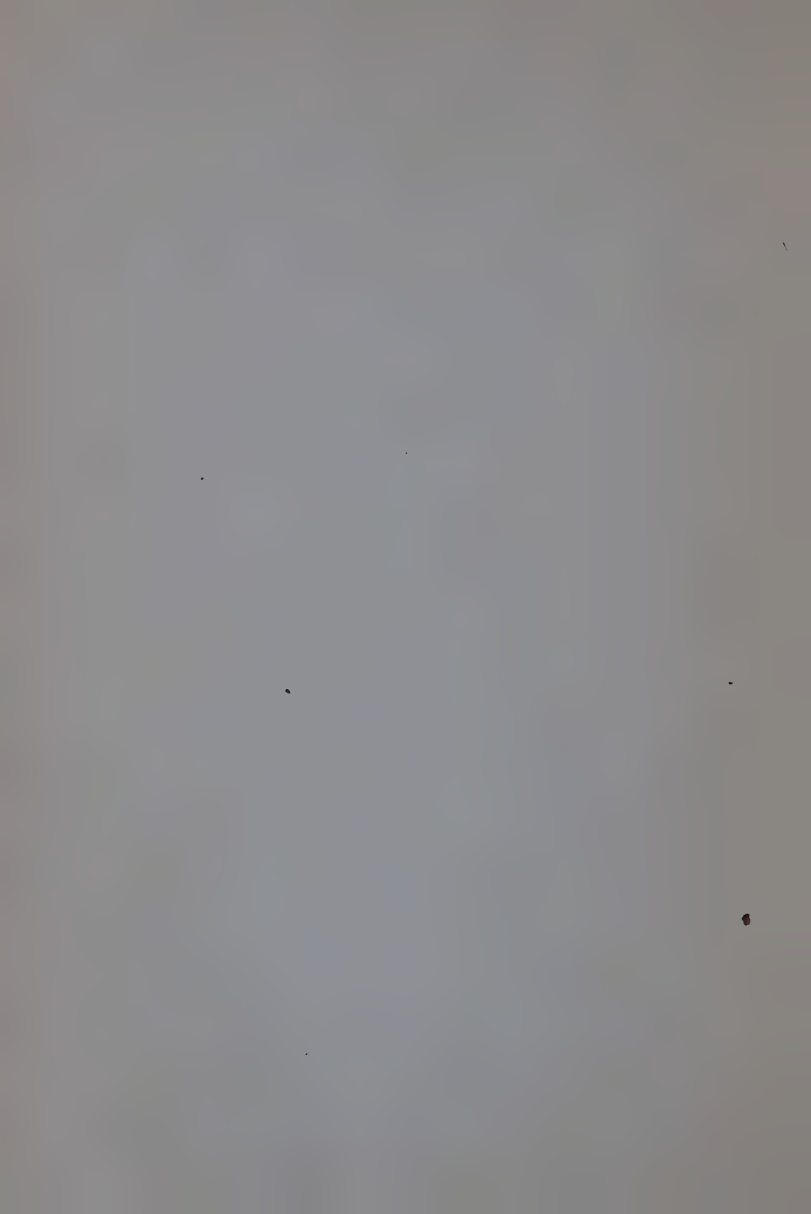
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TO
BLANCHE BUCHANAN RICE

SONNETS



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I

Life has its passions that enthrall the soul,
Lifting it high above all common wants;
The herd, with avid taste, sets for its goal
And, mindful of naught worthier, loudly vaunts.
Two have I had and still have—you and books:
Great passions both, soul-sanctifying, strong
To uplift, dynamic, scornful of mere looks
And show of earthly tinsel, babble and song
Of frippery. The lesser passion, books,
A consecration of the soul's estate
Entails for life, a heritage that brooks
No rivalry, save wherein soon and late
The greater passion, you, outreaches it
Investing life with glory halo-lit.

II

Beloved, in loving me you have forsworn
What many women deem beyond compare.
Have you—my soul would know—e'er wished
unborn

That love your soul for mine sweetly did dare?
Has life, for love, had showers of regrets,
Windfalls of heart-pent grief and temptests dire
Of subtle remorse, that error-like begets
A brood of fancies ruthless with desire
To run with heaven's hounds? O dearest soul,
If aught I've been or am—or must be still—
Has checked your proud aspirings toward the goal
Of highest happiness, to His just will
I sufferance leave. . . . Above, if not below,
May you love's sweetest recompenses know!

III

I question not your right to ask of me
How much I love you—love is woman's life;
So take forthwith, I pray, this golden key
Of simple words, shaped not in heat or strife
Of jealous passion, and unlock my heart:
Therein you'll find I love you with the strength
Of mighty resolution upheld in part
By bold intent to parallel the length
Of your own love for me. . . . And more, you'll
find

I love you with a passion tense as thought
Forged in the smithy of some titan mind
At whose behest world-quaking deeds are wrought.
So much, in truth, I love you can't you see
My love eternal-fruited is to be?

IV

Behold the landmark! See what changes time
Has wrought. Just here the wooden stile on which
We used to rest. Yonder the post, wild thyme
Still clustering at its base, in it the niche
I carved deeply that day about our names
While you stood near and watched. . . . But look,
 love, here. . . .

This weather-stained impression—Oh, not fame's
Own mark so sweet a memory or more dear
Could bring me!—yes, your name . . . carved by
 my hand!

O soul I love, the chrism of that day
Is still upon me . . . these faint letters and
This holy place incline my spirit to pray
 That heaven's over-arching destiny
 Round out in our twain lives full harmony!

V

When I recall the heavy weight of years
That bowed your spirit powerless still to break;
And glimpse again thru soul-dissolving fears,
Potent to set the stoutest heart a-quake,
The darkened room, the pain-racked form, you seem
As one released from Death's foreclosing hand
By miracle. . . . For often as in a dream,
Like characters traced in the inconstant sand,
I catch dim visions of a wistful face,
Pale against snowy pillow, lustrous eyes
Piercing my very soul intent to trace
Therein the confidence that death defies.

Life triumphed and your prisoned soul set
free. . . .

But only thru love's puissant decree!

VI

What moments do I prize the most, you ask?
Those gracious times when others with sweet praise
Of your good deeds a noble heart unmask
And towering minarets to your love upraise?
Or those fleeting, red-human moments when,
We two close-lipped exchanging sweetest vows,
I sense the beating of your heart, again
The subtlest passions of your soul arouse?
No—those rare interims of silence deep
Wherein my soul with yours communing finds
The unbridled joy that roams the fields of sleep,
The ecstasy of God-inspired minds.
Grant me such moments, Heaven, and I forego
The fruits of pride, vain pomp and earthly show.

VII

If you perchance survive my love-crowned day,
Grieve not for me as one who says farewell
And turns his face to distant lands away,
Never again to see you and to tell
What love means and what life is and is not
Without you. . . . If God beckons me first, O
heart

Of hearts, remember that the destined lot
Of all who love as we is that they part
Only to reunite somewhere in God's
Great universe and parallel the life
They knew on earth—not always free from clods
And stones and thorns, from malice, rancor and
strife.

If I go first, bethink you just a day
Must lapse . . . then we shall be together alway!

VIII

Love has its seasons four of rich estate:
Its luscious prime when passions flush the soul
Surging with riotous joy, yet never sate;
Its staid maturity wherein the goal
Of feverish yearnings crossed, life normal runs;
Its middle age of calmly-featured bliss
Lovely as placid countenance of nuns;
Its red-ripe days, like fruit we soon shall miss
Tenuously quivering on an aged tree.
Two of these weathered, into third we glide
Tranquil as vessel on a summer sea
Oblivious of storm and roaring tide.
 Why fear the last? Since we together cling,
 We can, assured, defy old age to sting.

IX

This faded bit of paper ambered by time
And characterized in words conventional,
A message brings than which nor rune nor rime
Of poet to me could be more magical.
Do you recall it, love, that formal note,
The first of many your deft fingers penned? . . .
"I shall be pleased to accept." . . . Ah, how it
 brought
To my impetuous soul favor reverend!
For, as a suppliant takes from queenly hand
The gage his gracious sovereign vouchsafes,
So I, an artless lover, naïve and
Rival-abashed, your answer. . . . O never waifs
 Of fortune sweeter syllables drank in:
My soul was sick its love-tryst to begin!

X

Did not the past hold full security
That love o'ermasters age and scorns decay,
My soul, outraged, would flout the purity
Of God's high purposes nor faith essay
In noble living. The modest violet
Queens it in fragrant beauty a few brief hours
Then yields to mother earth—and we forget;
Man's vast stupendous works, the mighty towers
His vanity has reared, some day must fall;
The heavens themselves, like flimsy parchment
scroll
Whereon are thoughts that myriad hearts enthrall,
The mighty hand that made them shall uproll:—
But love like ours knows not obscurity,
God-gendered, it preëmpts futurity!

XI

Unlike in much, O gracious heart, we still
In most are like. Upon the surface lie
Our differences so clearly traced who will
May read. Deep-bedded where no prurient eye
Dare gaze are those more subtle likenesses
That God and we behold. 'Tis they in-form
Our souls, unerring charts and compasses
Supply, for holier living furnish norm.
Bold heresy—the many-mouthèd charge
That in divergence of taste lies amplest hope
Of wedded joy! The truth is, where the marge
Of like and unlike thinnest grows the scope
Of bliss is widest. Therefore joy in this:
Our love thru likest tastes near-perfect is.

XII

Dearest, I can not hope to pay the debt
With which my soul is charged. Would you have
me,
Thru love's quit-claim, eternal bankrupt be,
Therefore love's pauper? How shall I offset
The largesse of your soul? How hope to match
In sweet intensity your passion's fire
Or, lifted high above earth's flushed desire,
Visions your soul discovers expect to catch?
Love's debtors wear no chains. Huge prison gates
Immure them not. Access to the throne room
Is ne'er denied; nor fear they word of doom
Since love forgives even the soul that hates.
Mortgaged to sweet desires, impoverished suitor.
Let me live on, therefore, your soul's great debtor.

XIII

Were I to love you with my eyes alone,
Guilty of high treason I should be.
Forbid, sweet Heaven, such fatuity—
My senses thus my reason to dethrone!
Beauty to many women, loveliness
Of soul to few is given. Beloved, in you
I find confederate these graces two,
Like sisters of unequal comeliness.
The younger, of earthen mould, sweet deference
pays
To her whose loveliness is heaven-born,
As sombre shadows of the early morn
Recede before the sun's advancing rays.
Treason, therefore, of me shall claim no
dole. . . .
Because I love you with both eye and soul.

XIV

Happy the land, our wise men say, that breaks
Not with its past. Happy likewise the course
Of love that knows not rupture, nor heartaches
That rend lives twain and paralyze the force
Of conjoint effort. Nature with means diverse,
Lavish of power, may glorify the earth
With light and warmth or lay it under curse
Of the storm's wrack. . . . So life and love from
birth.

Days there have been—a few—when our frail bark
Seemed drifting, perverse, on a treacherous sea
Of foolish misunderstanding:—but the dark
Winds hushed quickly and soon unto the lea
Where Love holds his eternal court we came,
Strengthened, close-bonded and purified thru
shame.

XV

What can I hope to give, O gracious heart,
In full requital of your bounteous love?
Words seem inept and thoughts I would impart
Sicken and pall the more I strive to prove
What else would rate me but a thankless clod
Insensate, lost to every finer touch
The grace of which makes man akin to God,
High-souled, deep-passioned. . . . Love, I would be
such

To match with perfectness your passion's flame,
Which like to that of sacred Vestal glows
With force undying, yesterday the same
As now, next year, forever—maugre woes.

Alas, a beggar I, little can offer

While you with queenly wealth rich largesse
proffer!

XVI

They lie who say that love a spendthrift is,
Else you and I are bankrupt. Put the test?
So be it, dearest, for, though oft confest,
A lie is still a lie. God's truth in this—
Our love has grown by so much as we've given
Each to the other. . . . Paradox, you'll say,
Yet truth thru paradox is God's own way
To the world's heart. . . . Lovers like us driven
To bankruptcy for lavish giving! The gold
Of Ophir and of Ind, Al Haroun's wealth,
Abdullam's fabled treasures heaped by stealth,
The pearls of Afric and of isles untold:—

In love's own coin all this we've given—even
more,

And still love has vast fields of virgin ore.

XVII

Child of no strange romance, sponsored by no
Mischance of fortune, our love its course has run,
Placid, for most, like isles where soft winds blow
Beneath blue skies under the tropic sun;
Troubled, perchance, when will against will has
 clashed—

Even the great Olympians knew discord—
Gently, not as the pitiless waves that lashed
To ruin some dauntless sea-faring horde;
Forbearing amid the round of daily toil,
Not warping or warped, as planets sometimes may;
Forthright in courtesy, needing no foil
For its own homely joys serene as day
 When winds are hushed and the sun hangs low
 in the west
And tired earth warns man it is time to rest.

XVIII

Too soon the day will come—if Heaven ordain
I must survive you—when like shattered flower,
Untimely sped by frost in evil hour,
I shall behold you gaoled in Death's domain.
Why may not we, as those twin stars of night—
Conjoined in rhythmic movement, life to life,
Like souls of perfect lovers void of strife—
That pale and disappear from mortal sight,
Thus, having orbéd ourselves in human ken,
Our tiny cycle of existence run,
Our devoirs rendered, common duties done,
Together at Death's gate adieu to men
 Regretful bid and pass, soul wed to soul,
 To Heaven's portal, man's divinest goal?

XIX

Forsooth, I wish you other than you are!
Why such a question, dear? What subtle change
Bethink you thru love's holy avatar,
By processes devout and passing strange,
Might make you sweetlier coveted? . . . Suppose
Your beauty like the morning's radiance,
Your eyes as lustrous as a full-blown rose,
Your voice with melody at variance,
Your mind scintillant as the stars at night—
Would these bring added loveliness to your soul?
This is your jewel, precious to me as light
To one benighted. Beauty is time's dole
And mind is loveless . . . your soul is my
star—
Why should I wish you other than you are?

XX

Grieve not that some will lightly rate our love.
Envy, like hawk, was ever wont to seek
His quarry, darting swiftly from above.
Malice, alas! makes short shrift of the meek,
While slander with his serpent's tooth dares all
To set his deadly fangs in beauty's form.
These can not harm—for Love has built a wall
Encircling us and canopied lest storm
Assail—so be it we keep inviolate
The mighty passion, heaven-kindled flame
That recks not any quenching, and consecrate
It to love's uses. . . . Then let who will cast blame!
In this, dear heart, lies our security:
That love is wisdom, all else fatuity.

XXI

My soul did hold high carnival that day,
Amid the trappings of exultant love,
When sickened, tortured, maddened by delay,
I pressed you for an answer and you wove
About me with three words of magic power
The golden meshes of affection rare
As one might count the moments of an hour
Spent in God's paradise. Oh, wondrous fair
The universe that day! The clouds to me
Were brothers, and like them I spurned the earth,
Soaring where only souls newly set free
By love requited, thru a second birth
Enter that holy realm we know must be
Fair charted in the soul's geography!

XXII

Beloved, in loving you I am twice blest,
Both giver and given, infallibly approved,
Since loving you I am by you beloved
And, therefore, love's darling doubly confest.
If to receive is lesser blessedness,
Then nobler, you, for who gives more is nearer
God. Content, though, I with the far dearer
Portion of sweet love's own loveliness;
For foolish were I to vie with you in this,
As fabled Marsyas who with Apollo strove
For mastery, since life to you is love
And love means giving. Mine the double bliss,
Therefore, of loving you, my soul-approved,
And by you richlier still being beloved.

XXIII

Often I wonder why you love me so;
How scatheless the frail vessel of your life
Has plowed tumultuous seas with rich cargo
Of purest love; how thru the welter and strife
Of clashing elements, the flotsam, all
The treacherous derelicts that foul the course
You've sailed serenely on, heeding the call
Of that great pilot, love. . . . And when, perforce,
Your voyage ended, you have crossed the bar
And do not find me waiting on the shore,
Turn your eyes seaward and not very far
In the offing my rude bark sea-drenched and sore
Bereft you'll find . . . for know, your love shall
 lead me
Thru life, thru death—yea thru eternity!

XXIV

Fie, love! what need is there of sophistry
To plead my cause? Do not receding years
Afford your soul release from mordant fears
That I may tire in love's sweet ministry?
Question your heart. Do you believe its love
For me, thru the past years so richly given,
So chaste you have no need of being shriven,
Will ever wane? Shall coming years disprove
Your oft-protested vows? If so, perhaps—
I'm only human, dear—my love might tire
Of voicing its deep passionate desire
For you. . . . But fie! so long as Heaven caps
The earth with beauty your love will abide
And my own love for you naught shall betide.

XXV

When I am dead and men perchance dilate
Upon the earthly deeds my hands have wrought,
Beware lest you, emotion-mastered, prate
Like silly child. Say merely that I fought
Open and fair scorning the coward's hold—
Thus and no more. Millions have done as well;
Why babble of deeds, which are as tales twice-told
And therefore irksome? . . . Let who dares retell!
But this, since love not deeds your theme must be,
To the winds fling bidding them waft afar:
The love I bore you ever seemed to me
My soul's great passion, holy as the star
That led the Magi across desert space
And piloted the shepherds to His face.

XXVI

I have been conscious ever thru the years
Of subtle changes wrought by daily use
In both of us, changes that seemed to fuse
Our differences, purging idle tears
And, thru accord of souls, grounding all fears
Of ever-widening interests, clashing views,
Which love's sweet confidences so abuse
That time instead of greening only seres.
And now, what of the years that lie ahead?
Shall custom stale them and drab usage dull;
Must we in them discern a glory fled
And find, the kernel gone, life but a hull?
Folly, the thought! where love has wrought so
well
Nothing save death our happiness can knell.

XXVII

And do you never tire of hearing me
Repeat the oft-voiced phrase? Is love to you—
Beshrew me if I utter word untrue—
As breath to life, as depth to rayless sea?
So be it, and with sweet celerity,
As when one sips delicious nectar-brew,
I phrase the words precious as honey-dew:
I love you . . . you . . . yes, you . . . just you
only!

What magic lurks in words, what power behind
Their subtle chemic force when linked with love
Can open to the soul, as sight to the blind,
Visions of what the angels know above?
Oh, now I pray that 'you may never tire
Of hearing words shall match your soul's desire!

Whatever grace these halting verses claim,
I yield it solely unto you, my Muse.
Ah, now I comprehend why Beatrice' name
To Dante was of so divine a use!
Your comeliness deserves a nobler pen;
Your loveliness of soul, more gracious lines
Than these I trace or dare to trace again,
Envisaging to my soul in sweet confines
Of thought the image of yourself potent
To evoke from silent depths my meed of praise.
Unworthy I, 'tis your strong love has lent
Me wingèd hopes and taught my spirit to raise
 Itself aloft in realms of poesy
 Illumed, sustained by golden fantasy.

How dear the little tricks young lovers use!
Crafty ogling, clandestine messages,
Cryptic remarks, mysterious signs, gages
Of passion shrouded as soul of a recluse.
Do you recall them, dear, the precious notes
Slyly exchanged when our love yet was young,
The parting glance amid the churchly throng,
The darkling whistle trilling from our throats
Ecstatic as the mocker's call to mate?
O golden days when love took love on faith,
When grief was insubstantial as a wraith
And hope, divinely clad, was laureate!
Dearest, life without memories shrined as ours
Is like a garden fair wanting sweet flowers.

XXX

Life has its mysteries so subtly spun
We aye live in a welter of surmise.
In you, beloved, I find such mystery, one
More luring than the heaven-light in your eyes.
A thousand times I've plummeted your soul
And times ten thousand trailed your furtive thought,
Only to find in searching for the whole
Of you infinitesimal portion, naught
Save what the surface is to ocean's deeps.
'Tis true—love has so wrought that we are one,
Yet into your sweet depths I peer as peeps
Into earth's all-excluding depths the sun.
 Enigma you, abysmal, subtle, profound. . . .
 Less or more would I love if your soul my mind
 could impound?

XXXI

Thru all the ages men on high emprise
Have sallied forth buoyant with hope divine:
Captains of lordly troops in phalanxed line,
Sailors in gallant barks of merchandise,
Discoverers of new worlds, statesmen wise,
Inventors, great philanthropists, in fine,
All those, elect of earth, who never decline
Combat or peril intent to grasp the prize.
Such high adventure likewise have I known
Within the realm love claims as his demesne,
Transcending aught chivalric knight may own
Of prowess waged in honor of his queen.

For to have won and kept such love as yours
Is emprise perfect, one that grandly lures.

XXXII

My soul today is like a buffeted ship
Seeking the quiet haven of your love.
The dun clouds lower and the mad winds whip
The roily waves to fury. But above
The elemental clash of wind and wave,
Clear sounding as the tones of silver lute,
I hear your reassuring voice and crave
The harbor's refuge where the winds are mute.
Oh, what if my frail bark drift from its course;
If storms of passion hurl it on the reef;
Or winds of vain caprice with pitiless force
Toss it about as autumn gusts the leaf?
Courage, and yet more courage, O my soul. . . .
How sweet the thought of rest beyond the goal!

XXXIII

And yet, my soul no "de profundis" lifts,
Since your strong love has kept me from despair
And over-arched me with such tender care
I have had little need of other gifts.
Perchance had you — O heart, forgive the
thought. . . .

As well expect the sun forget to shine,
Or mighty ocean in a sieve confine!
But that your deep affection in me wrought
Such faith as topples mountains, ladders builds
To heaven's gate, the dead brings back to life,
Surcease invokes of fratricidal strife
And cynic doubts contaminate yelpings stills,
My love, my life, my all had proved sterile—
Out of the depths I should be crying still.

XXXIV

O what is love that over me your sway
Is rhythmic as that of moon on earth's wild tides?
Whence comes the power mighty to allay
The mad unrest that in all hearts abides?
True miracle is wrought—but how? Is there
Amid the spheres some vast magnetic force
From which, two souls each unto each laid bare,
Streams energy that warps them from the course
Of single effort merging the twain as one?
Or must we truckle to drab science and say
That, sense on sense impinging, love is none
Other than lowly child of common clay?
Let who will answer. . . . This is certainty:
Invincible love vouchsafes you sovereignty!

XXXV

Why should you think, beloved, your work in vain?
If what thru many toilsome years I've wrought
Withstands corroding time, none will disdain
Your ample portion of the honors sought.
No great deed ever saw the light of day
But some true woman sponsored it. Think not,
Therefore, to lurk within my shadow. Lay
This sweetly to your anxious heart: that what
Desert is yours I scorn to claim. Could I
The serried phalanxes of toil have faced,
Inspiriting love denied me? Or what high
Turrets have scaled by your strong faith not braced?
Oh, the little is much when love is the priceless
leaven,
For it's just the difference, sweet, between earth
and heaven!

XXXVI

How shall I match the music of your heart?
In vain I touch the strings of my soul's lyre. . . .
Discord mars all. O love, to me impart
Your subtle skill so that my soul may quire
Its passions deep in unison with yours!
Sweet as the notes of mock-bird singing at eve
To cheer its nesting mate, your music lures
While my coarse strains seem but a make-believe.
Am I but echoing voice, a poor, sick soul
Whose cadences are faint? Like viol cracked
Must I in broken music find my dole,
The fate of all by lethal discords racked?
Oh, love, again I lift the heartfelt plea. . . .
The secret teach of your soul's melody!

XXXVII

Great Men have known great loves in ages past
Eternalized in song or deathless verse:
Paola and Francesca, passion-aghast,
Untimely sped by Malatesta's curse;
Dante and Beatrice of heavenly mien;
Petrarch and Laura; Brutus and Portia brave;
Browning and his beloved—poesy's queen;
Marc Antony, fair Cleopatra's slave. . . .
Loves worthy and unworthy: let them stand.
Like these immortals fealty I proclaim
To love's enthrallment; kinship I demand
For that my love is great as theirs and fame
 As rightly mine, since love from low estate
 Exalts a lover to high heaven's gate.

XXXVIII

If Death should steal upon me unaware,
Grieve not with vain regrets your life away,
For naught avails the tense, febrile display
Of sorrow. Why your happiness forswear?
Death's but an incident of life, a rare
Transcendent moment when thru rank decay
Of plasmic mould the soul, released, its way
Wings swift to higher realms. . . . I know not
where.

In this find healing for your anguished heart:
That Love his mighty will in us has wrought,
Thru many a year welding us part by part
Indissolubly one in purpose. Taught
Thus richly to know life thru gracious love
Our souls, rejoined, eternal troth shall prove.

XXXIX

What wealth is mine, beloved, in loving you!
Not he of Lydia whose Pactolean gold,
Heaped high in brilliant Sardis, to withhold
The Persian hordes was impotent, is due
Supremacy. Nor he of Agra who,
As mighty tales and legends do unfold!—
How little need herewith to be retold!—
The Taj with matchless glory did endue.
Such wealth, dear heart, with mine can not compare,
Whose mintage is of heaven where love abides;
And as the sands are scattered by the tides,
So Mammon's goodly heritage must fare.
But love, which is my wealth, untouched shall be
By aught I ween of dread fatality!

XL

When memory, unveiling silent years,
Pale phantoms of a past long dead reveals,
Into my soul a ghostly rabble steals:
Ashen regrets and inappeasable fears,
Spectres of good deeds still-born, spirit desires
That perished of inanition, shadowy hopes
Of service vast as empire of the Popes
That withered in the heat of passions' fires.
O soul of souls, the years of my dead life—
God's mercy on them!—but for your matchless love,
To rival which ever in vain I strove,
Had been like music of a broken fife
 In hands of one whose soul with love afire
 Could not, for its defects, voice love's desire!

XLI

What other soul could my soul love as yours?
Beauty more rare, I've known, emotion-lit,
More subtly sensuous charms and sprightlier wit,
But never soul that ampler love inures.
O heart, with you is neither better nor worse,
Nor white nor black, nor idle rich nor poor,
Sinner nor saint, renowned savant nor boor—
Your soul immures all of God's universe!
Love is your life. The fragrant flower you touch
Yields richer perfume. Mercy follows you
As quickened life revivifying dew;
Nor doubt I your own love for me is such
In purity as is an angel's breath,
Than life more precious, stronger even than
death.

XLII

How lightly time has fallen on our love!
Thrice more than thirty winters' icy breath,
Fell harbinger of that dread monster, Death,
Have sought vainly our love-right to disprove:
The sheer monotony of household cares,
The drudgery that waits on common toil,
The racking anguish bred of ceaseless moil,
The sickening task of plucking up rank tares,
The rapier thrusts of envy-stricken hearts,
The unkind kindness of reputed friends,
The cruel jests that hate with malice blends,
The virus that a spiteful soul imparts—
All these, dear heart, most impotently strove. . . .
How lightly time has fallen on our love!

XLIII

Often I muse on that sweet day in youth
When first I saw you unaware and felt
Instant desire, all lesser passions melt
And fuse by dint of first love's mystic truth
Into one mighty passion, not uncouth
With low impulse, but pure as though I knelt
At love's high altar or in Elysium dwelt
Withdrawn afar from man's constraint or ruth.
Though time the leash has slipt since that sweet day
And strands have silvered that were burnished gold;
Though wrinkles creep where roses used to play,
Reminder, dear, that you are growing old. . . .
 Undimmed that memory still like jacinth ray
 Of Urim—in antique story told.

XLIV

As one rapt with music of Paradise,
So I that memorable day long years ago
When softly you said "Yes." Love, the surprise
Of that ecstatic moment none can know!
The heavens opened and I passed within,
Earth and its sordid cares clean out of sight;
The angels sang to me—I seemed akin
To seraph souls that know nor day nor night
But only one unending bliss with God!
Strange that three simple letters voiced by you,
The music of one softly-spoken word,
My soul from earth to heavenly portals drew!
Ah, love, as well expect a star to capture
As I forget aught of that matchless rapture!

XLV

The fresh May wind blew softly on us twain,
The maple leaves bent low and whispered love,
From the deep stillness of a cedar grove
A mock-bird trilled his rapture sovereign.
The field lark whistled notes of gladdest cheer,
The crows with raucous caw flapped gaily by,
The lush grass in a fragrant meadow nigh
Breathed redolence of joy unstained by tear.
What bliss it was that day to be alive
And walk in adoration by your side:
To yearn the passing moment might abide
Eternal—that no further my soul strive!
O radiant memory of our maiden stroll,
How rich am I thru years of loving toll!

When summer's majesty I see decline
 As autumn with his blighting frost draws near,
 I hate that Death in this should give me sign
 Of his fell purpose—that a life so dear
 To mine own soul must from my soul be riven,
 Perhaps when life and love, conjunct in joy,
 Confederate in sweet hopes, of misdeeds shriven,
 Have loosed them from the grosser things that cloy
 And fetter the soul's free movements. . . . Loathed,
 the thought
 That ambushes my plans and haunts me day
 And night with stressful fears like spectres wrought
 Of a mind diseased pervious to quick decay!
 But this churl Death, obdurate though he be,
 Knows well your soul he can not filch from me.

I've heard men prate of love in the same breath
They praised their dogs, their caddies, flippantly,
As God's fools sometimes slaver about death,
Or Brahman speaks of pariah, scornfully.
I've known men at the marriage altar vow
To cherish love eternally—and before
The fragrant bridal flowers had withered somehow
Give love a mortal stab. . . . Dearest, the ore
With others may run thin, play out, its lead
May crop forth and the lure end . . . as for me—
The vein but widens as the years recede
And richer grows; therefore unfalteringly
 I face old age with stout heart confident
 That never shall love find me indigent.

Beloved, when our two souls stand face to face
In presence of Him who judges small and great,
Will your soul, awed by Love's compelling grace,
Plead for my soul that it be spared a fate
Worse than Nirvana? For I'm conscious, love,
Abashed, of my own soul's stark indigence,
While you shall need no word of mine to prove
Your own soul's richly jeweled opulence.
Oh, in that moment when by His just word
I may for countless æons be rapt from you,
Will you not intercede with our dear Lord
That whither your soul fares my soul fare too?
Pardon I crave for this so selfish plea. . . .
I can bear *all* He sends with you near me.

XLIX

Love must be granted its hyperboles,
For souls that breathe great passions each to each
Find common terms inept and in sweet orgies
Of honeyed phrases revel without breach
Of love's decorum . . . ; justly so, yet when
Their passion stalks across the printed page
Restraint becomes seemly. Forgive me then
If my cold lines to your soul give umbrage
In that you miss those nameless epithets,
The thousand sugared words we lovers use
And prize so, cryptic turns of thought, assets
None but a loveless fool would dare refuse.

Does this suffice, or have I vainly striven,
Before your soul's confessional still unshriven?

Dearest, these fifty sonnets love-enchained—
 One for each twelvemonth God has vouchsafed
 you—

Nurslings of an affection heaven-ordained
 And chrismed with joy, like dead soul born anew,
 I lay now at your feet. What though with cold,
 Critical breath the world exhale disdain,
 And some to whom no secrets love has told
 Cry "Fie!" . . . If you but stoop to lift them,
 fain

Am I to reckon aught else . . . and, dearest, as you
 Have often pressed wild flowers to your breast,
 Azaleas fair, pale lilies—even rue,
 Smile graciously on this my love's behest:

Enfold within your heart these yearning lines
 Wherein my soul its secrets sweet enshrines!

